NUMB. CLXXIII.

The SPECTATOR.

Ut nemo in ſeſe tentat deſcendere!——Perſ.

Saturday, June 7. 1712.

HYPOCRISIE, at the faſhionable End of the Town, is very different from Hypocriſie in the City. The modiſh Hypocrite endeavours to appear more Vicious than he really is, the other kind of Hypocrite more Virtuous. The former is afraid of every thing that has the ſhew of Religion in it, and would be thought engaged in many Criminal Gallantries and Amours, of which he is not guilty of. The latter aſſumes a Face of Sanctity, and covers a Multitude of Vices under a ſeeming Religious Deportment.

But there is another kind of Hypocriſie, which differs from both theſe, and which I intend to make the Subject of this Paper: I mean that Hypocriſie, by which a Man does not only deceive the World, but very often impoſes on himſelf; That Hypocriſie, which conceals his own Heart from him, and makes him believe he is more virtuous than he really is, and either not attend to his Vices or miſtake them for his Vices for Virtues. It is this fatal Hypocriſie and Self-deceit, which is taken notice of in thoſe Words, *Who can underſtand his Errours? Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults.*

If the open Profeſſors of Impiety deſerve the utmoſt Application, and Endeavours of Moral Writers to recover them from Vice and Folly, how much more may thoſe lay a Claim to their Care and Compaſſion, who are walking in the Paths of Death, while they fancy themſelves engaged in a Courſe of Virtue! I ſhall endeavour, therefore, to lay down ſome Rules for the Diſcovery of thoſe Faults that lurk in the ſecret Corners of the Soul, and to ſhew my Reader thoſe Methods by which he may arrive at a true and impartial Knowledge of himſelf. The uſual Means preſcribed for this Purpoſe, are to examine our ſelves by the Rules which are laid down for our Direction in Sacred Writ, and to compare our Lives with the Life of that Perſon who acted up to the Perfection of Human Nature, and is the ſtanding Example, as well as the Great Guide and Inſtructor, of thoſe who receive his Doctrines. Though theſe two Heads cannot be too much inſiſted upon, I ſhall but juſt mention them, becauſe they have been handled by many Great and Eminent Writers.

I would therefore propoſe the following Methods to the Conſideration of ſuch as would find out their ſecret Faults, and make a true Eſtimate of themſelves.

In the firſt place, let them conſider well what are the Characters which they bear among their Enemies. Our Friends very often flatter us, as much as our own Hearts. They either do not ſee our Faults, or conceal them from us, or ſoften them by their Repreſentations, after ſuch a manner, that we think them too trivial to be taken notice of. An Adverſary, on the contrary, makes a narrower Search into us, diſcovers every Flaw and Imperfection in our Tempers, and though his Malice may ſet them in too ſtrong a Light, it has generally ſome Ground for what it advances. A Friend exaggerates a Man's Virtues, an Enemy inflames his Crimes. A Wiſe Man ſhould give a juſt Attention to both of them, ſo far as they may tend to the Improvement of the one, and diminution of the other. *Plutarch* has written an Eſſay on the Benefits which a Man may receive from his Enemies, and, among the good Fruits of Enmity, mentions this in particular, that by the Reproaches which it caſts upon us we ſee the worſt ſide of our ſelves, and open our Eyes to ſeveral Blemiſhes and Defects in our Lives and Converſations, which we ſhould not have obſerved, without the help of ſuch ill-natured Monitors.

In order likewiſe to come at a true Knowledge of our ſelves, we ſhould conſider on the other hand how far we may deſerve the Praiſes and Approbations which the World beſtow upon us; whether the Actions they celebrate proceed from laudable and worthy Motives, and how far we are really poſſeſſed of the Virtues which gain us Applauſe among thoſe with whom we converſe. Such a Reflection is abſolutely neceſſary, if we conſider how apt we are either to Value or Condemn our ſelves by the Opinions of others, and to Sacrifice the Report of our own Hearts to the Judgment of the World.

In the next place, that we may not deceive our ſelves in a point of ſo much Importance, we ſhould not lay too great a ſtreſs on any ſuppoſed Virtues we poſſeſs

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that are of a doubtful Nature: and such we may esteem all those in which Multitudes of Men dissent from us, who are as good and wise as our selves. We should always act with great Cautiousness and Circumspection, in Points where it is not impossible that we may be deceived. Intemperate Zeal, Bigotry and Persecution for any Party or Opinion, how praise-worthy soever they may appear to weak Men of our own Principles, produce infinite Calamities among Mankind, and are highly Criminal in their own Nature; and yet how many Persons eminent for Piety suffer such monstrous and absurd Principles of Action to take Root in their Minds under the Colour of Virtues? For my own part I must own I never yet knew any Party so just and reasonable, that a Man could follow it in its height and violence, and at the same time be innocent.

We should likewise be very apprehensive of those Actions which proceed from natural Constitution, favourite Passions, particular Education, or whatever promotes our worldly interest or Advantage. In these and the like cases, a Man's Judgment is easily perverted, and a wrong Bias hung upon his Mind. These are the Inlets of Prejudice, the unguarded Avenues of the Mind, by which a thousand Errors and secret Faults find Admission, without being observed or taken Notice of. A wise Man will suspect those Actions to which he is directed by something more than Reason, and always apprehend some concealed Evil in every Resolution that is of a disputable Nature, when it is conformable to his particular Temper, his Age, or way of Life, or when it favours his Pleasure or his Profit.

There is nothing of greater Importance to us, than thus diligently to sift our Thoughts, and examine all these dark Recesses of the Mind, if we would establish our Souls in such a solid and substantial Virtue, as will turn to account in that great Day, when it must stand the Test of infinite Wisdom and Justice.

I shall conclude this Essay with observing that the two kinds of Hypocrisie I have here spoken of, namely, that of deceiving the World, and that of imposing on our selves, are touched with wonderful Beauty in the hundred and thirty ninth Psalm. The Folly of the first kind of Hypocrisie is there set forth by Reflections on God's Omniscience and Omnipresence, which are celebrated in as noble strains of Poetry as any other I ever met with, either Sacred or Prophane. The other kind of Hypocrisie, whereby a Man deceives himself, is intimated in the two last Verses, where the Psalmist addresses himself to the great Searcher of Hearts in that emphatical Petition; *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my Thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

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